

## **GUIDELINES FOR SC DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICERS**

### **OBJECTIVE:**

To timely disseminate information to the news media regarding the activities and investigations of the five DPS divisions that employ sworn police personnel and to forge a positive relationship between DPS and the news media of South Carolina.

### **IMPLEMENTATION:**

Each Highway Patrol District shall have one trooper designated as its District Community Relations Officer (CRO) and one alternative CRO. It is the responsibility of each District CRO to form a relationship with the media in his/her District and to be readily accessible. The District CRO will be the primary liaison between the news media in the District and the SCHP.

The State Transport Police, the Bureau of Protective Services, the Criminal Justice Academy, and the Office of Professional Responsibility shall each have one officer to work closely with the Office of Executive Affairs in release of information to the media and public.

### **DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:**

1. It is the District Highway Patrol CRO's responsibility to handle media inquiries. The CRO will alert the media in the District of any event that will cause traffic problems or would be of media interest. The CRO disseminates all information regarding accidents to the media. This will usually be accomplished by telephone except when TV or radio wants a "live" or "taped" interview.
2. The representative from the State Transport Police, the Bureau of Protective Services, the Criminal Justice Academy, and the Office of Professional Responsibility shall have the primary responsibility of assisting the Office of Executive Affairs with all media inquiries pertaining to their respective divisions. These PIO's should notify the Office of Executive Affairs whenever they receive any inquiry from the media.
3. If a situation warrants, the CRO will go to the scene of any incident, which generates media interest to coordinate media coverage. The CRO, upon consultation with and assistance from a representative of the Office of Executive Affairs, will handle on-the-scene media interviews and will ensure that the media remain behind the perimeters of the scene so as not to damage the integrity of the investigation. The CRO will also help provide photographers with the best vantage point for photographing the scene. If access to the scene will be prevented for a number of hours, the CRO will attempt to provide limited access to small groups of reporters/photographers or a pool reporter and photographer and will guide them in and out of the scene.

## **COORDINATION AND ASSISTANCE:**

1. The investigating officer at a scene will assist the CRO in assembling facts for dissemination to the media. The PIO will have access to the investigating officer at the scene in order to gather the available information.
  2. In minor traffic accidents, the investigating trooper may release information to the media, but the scope of that information will be limited to the Uniform Traffic Collision Report.
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1. A commanding officer or a representative from the Office of Executive Affairs will assist the PIO in disseminating information to the media, including but not limited to the following situations:
    - a. officer or suspect fires a weapon
    - b. officer is involved in high-speed pursuit
    - c. officer is injured while performing his/her duties
    - d. school bus accidents
    - e. public figure or public official is arrested and/or involved in an accident
    - f. overturned tractor trailers, spills, and major road closings
    - g. breach in security in any state-owned facility (including bomb evacuations)
    - h. train related accidents

## **NOTIFICATION AND REFERRAL PROCEDURES:**

1. The PIO will notify the Office of Executive Affairs at the earliest opportunity in the event of the following:
  - a. officer or suspect fires a weapon
  - b. officer is involved in high-speed pursuit
  - c. officer is injured while performing his/her duties
  - d. school bus accidents (when injuries or fatalities occur)
  - e. public figures or public official is arrested and/or involved in an accident
  - f. overturned tractor trailers, spills, and major road closings
  - g. breach in security in any state-owned facility (including bomb evacuations)
  - h. train related accidents
2. The PIO cannot answer any inquiries regarding department policy. All policy questions must be referred to the Office of Executive Affairs in Columbia. Any questions regarding internal investigations, law suits, pursuit policy, personnel matters concerning other state or local agencies, or high profile individuals must be referred to the Office of Executive Affairs.
3. If the PIO is misquoted in a story, quoted when he/she should not have been (e.g. comments “off the record”), or if he/she notices any inaccuracies or misrepresentations in a story for which he/she provided information, the PIO needs to notify the Office of Executive Affairs before contacting the reporter and/or assignment editor to obtain a correction.

4. If the PIO is asked to be a part of a press conference and/or speaking engagement by anyone other than a member of DPS management, he/she needs to notify the Office of Executive Affairs prior to making a commitment to participate.

Revision 4/1/99